

**Benjamin H. Latrobe to Thomas Jefferson, June 28,  
1817, from Thomas Jefferson and the National Capital.  
Edited by Saul K. Padover.**

**Latrobe to Jefferson**

*Washington, June 28th. 1817*

THOS. JEFFERSON ESQR.

*Monticello*

*Dear Sir,*

I have found so much pleasure in studying the plan of your College, that the drawings have grown into a larger bulk than can be conveniently sent by the Mail. If you can point out to me any convenient mode of conveyance within a few days, I should gladly avail myself of it. I have put the whole upon one very large sheet, which I am very unwilling to double; and to roll it on a stick will make it inconvenient for the Mail bag. Colonels McCrae & McCraw of Richmond are now here, & in a week will return. If the conveyance from Richmond is more convenient, they will cheerfully take it thither.

The Capitol is growing into a more intelligible form & arrangement, than it had since its destruction by the British. — If the permanence of the seat of the Government at Washington would not have been endangered by it, — it would have been better in every point of view that the wish of Adm. Cockburn had prevailed over the humanity of Genl. Ross, & the whole building had been destroyed by Gunpowder. At a less expense to the U States, a much more convenient, & magnificent building could have been erected, than will be made of the ruins of the former.

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Many alterations have been made in the interior. The form of the house of Representatives is changed so as to admit the members to the South windows, & the Gallery is of course on the E. N. & West sides. — The Senate Chamber is enlarged to the utmost possible extent which the walls would permit. The staircase the construction of which you may remember to have been rather singular & the execution uncommonly excellent, is now converted into a large Vestibule with a rotunda to admit light into the lower story, and a more easy ascent is made by a new Staircase on the S. E. side where a Court was intended by the plan of 1806–7. The President has taken a very strong interest in the completion of the Capitol, & the work is going on as rapidly as Men & money can execute it.

In the National Intelligencer of January 18th 1817 I gave some account of the beautiful Marble of which most of the Columns of the Capital are to be made. — There are now 9 blocks here, from 6 to 8 feet long each. Three of them make one Column. They are rounded, but not yet polished. — Nothing can exceed the beauty of the Stone when polished, & as the Cement which unites the pebbles does not receive quite so high a polish as the pebbles themselves, the Mass acquires a spangled appearance, which adds greatly to the brilliancy of its effect.

The remark I have made on the difficulty of introducing this marble is not one of those tirades, in which disappointed men are apt to indulge. The opposition of so respectable a Man as Mr Blagden was to be encountered, & of many others. He reported in writing, that the stone would not bear its own weight, when *lewis'ed*. I immediately suspended by a small Lewis, a block of 2 Ton weight in the Capitol. He then doubted whether it could be wrought, — & to try the experiment, a small Column 3 inches in diameter *which had been wrought & polished*, & had been placed in the temporary house of Representatives the whole Session, was knocked to pieces by the Sand stone cutters, & the fragments produced to prove that it could *not be wrought or polished*. But the President soon decided the contest & there are now 100 men, laborers & Stone cutters at work in the Quarry.

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— I presumed, that below Your mountain the same stone must be found. It crosses the Reppahannoc in Orange County, in very large Masses.—

I need not assure you, that any opportunity which may occur, to prove to you how sincere is the respect & attachment, which as an individual and as a citizen I feel towards you, will be eagerly seized by me & improved.

Most respectfully Yrs

B Henry Latrobe

P.S. I have a rough Stone Model of the Capital of a Column composed of Tobacco leaves & flowers which I wish to send to you. I can easily get it to Richmond by a coal Vessel returning this. If you will please to let me know to whom I shall direct it, I shall be obliged to You. I will enclose in the box some specimens of the Pebble Marble. — The Capital has too weak an effect, & I intend to cut the relief of the leaves deeper. But it never will equal the Corn capital.

In the printed account of the Marble there are many typographical Errors. — *Bedding stone* is printed for Pudding stone &c.

I write still with Peale's or rather Hawkin's, polygraph. — the same which I have had since 1803. — It is a little crazy, & has lost its spring which I have not been able to replace so that I write a somewhat different hand with the polygraph, from that which I write without it. You had adopted Bolton's manifold Writer when I last saw You, but as your letter is written with common ink I presume you have returned to the Polygraph.

[has taken too much trouble with drawings send by mail the new marble send capital to G. & J. Richmd Polygraph] — (marginal comment in Jefferson's hand — S.K.P.)

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